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Night of Beginnings
A Passover Haggadah
MARCIA FALK

A groundbreaking new haggadah for the Passover seder

Night of Beginnings is a groundbreaking new haggadah for the Passover seder from acclaimed poet, translator, and liturgist Marcia Falk, beautifully designed and illustrated with original watercolor drawings by the author.

Unlike both traditional and new haggadahs, which do not contain a full recounting of the biblical story, Night of Beginnings presents the Exodus narrative in its entirety, providing a direct connection to the ancient origins of the holiday. This retelling highlights the actions of its female characters, including Miriam; Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopts the baby Moshe; and the midwives Shifrah and Pu’ah, who save the Hebrew male infants. Falk’s revolutionary new blessings, in Hebrew and English, replace the traditional, patriarchal seder blessings, and her kavanot—meditative directions for prayer—introduce a genre new to the seder ritual. Poems, psalms, and songs are arranged to give structural coherence to the haggadah. A new commentary raises interpretive questions and invites us to bring personal reflections into the discussion.

Like the author’s widely acclaimed previous prayer books, The Book of Blessings and The Days Between, Falk’s poetic blessings for the seder envision the divine as a Greater Whole of which we are an inseparable part. The inclusive language of Falk’s blessings makes room for women to find and use their voices more full-throatedly than they were able to do with the male-centered prayers inherited from the early rabbis. Men, too, will encounter here a spiritually moving and thought-provoking experience.

Marcia Falk is a poet, translator, liturgist, and artist known widely for her groundbreaking prayer books The Book of Blessings and The Days Between, which re-create Hebrew and English prayer from an inclusive, nonpatriarchal perspective. Falk is also the creator of a volume combining her art and poetry, Inner East: Illuminated Poems and Blessings, and other books of poetry and translation, including a now-classic translation of the Song of Songs.

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By expanding musar literature to include not only the texts of the Musar movement and those influenced by them but also liberal and secular Jewish thinkers, Claussen forces the fields of modern Jewish thought and ethics to rethink their boundaries.

—Yonatan Y. Brafman, assistant professor of religion, Tufts University

A major, illuminating contribution to contemporary musar literature.

—Rabbi Ira F. Stone, Rosh Yeshiva, Center for Contemporary Mussar

A mind-expanding view of Jewish ethical character development and a pedagogic tour de force. In juxtaposing contrasting perspectives—rather than a single ‘paradigmatically Jewish’ view of moral virtue—on many ethical issues, Professor Claussen compels us to consider divergent views of qualities of soul.

—Rabbi Amy Eilberg, senior faculty, the Mussar Institute

Modern Musar
Contested Virtues in Jewish Thought
GEOFFREY D. CLAUSSEN
FOREWORD BY LOUIS E. NEWMAN

Rethinking the boundaries of modern Jewish thought and ethics

How do modern Jews understand virtues such as courage, humility, justice, solidarity, or love? In truth: they have fiercely debated how to interpret them. This groundbreaking anthology of musar (Jewish traditions regarding virtue and character) explores the diverse ways seventy-eight modern Jewish thinkers understand ten virtues: honesty and love of truth; curiosity and inquisitiveness; humility; courage and valor; temperance and self-restraint; gratitude; forgiveness; love, kindness, and compassion; solidarity and social responsibility; and justice and righteousness. These thinkers—from the Musar movement to Hasidism to contemporary Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Renewal, Humanist, and secular Jews—often agree on the importance of these virtues but fundamentally disagree in their conclusions. The juxtaposition of their views, complemented by Geoffrey Claussen’s pointed analysis, allows us to see tensions with particular clarity—and sometimes to recognize multiple compelling ways of viewing the same virtue.

By expanding the category of musar literature to include not only classic texts and traditional works influenced by them but also the writings of diverse rabbis, scholars, and activists—men and women—who continue to shape Jewish tradition, Modern Musar challenges the fields of modern Jewish thought and ethics to rethink their boundaries—and invites us to weigh and refine our own moral ideals.

Geoffrey D. Claussen is an associate professor of religious studies, chair of the Department of Religious Studies, and Lori and Eric Sklut Scholar in Jewish Studies at Elon University. He is author of Sharing the Burden: Rabbi Simḥah Zissel Ziv and the Path of Musar and is a past president of the Society of Jewish Ethics.

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A Documentary History
RAFAEL MEDOFF

Teaching America’s response to the Holocaust through the lens of 100 important documents

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The twenty chapters address a broad range of subjects and events, among them America’s response to Hitler’s rise, U.S. public opinion about Jews, immigration policy, the Wagner-Rogers bill to save children, American rescuers, news coverage of atrocities, American Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust, the campaign for U.S. rescue action, the question of bombing Auschwitz, and liberation.

Viewing real documents as a means to understanding core issues will deepen reader involvement with this material. High school and college students as well as general readers of all levels of knowledge will be engaged in understanding this crucial chapter in American history and weighing questions regarding mass atrocities in our own era.

Rafael Medoff is founding director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies and the coeditor of the institute’s online Encyclopedia of America’s Response to the Holocaust. He has written more than twenty books about American Jewish history, the Holocaust, and related topics, including The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust (JPS, 2019).

“This is an important and long-overdue book—exactly the material students need to understand this crucial chapter in American history and inform them as they consider issues related to genocide in our own time.”—Bat-Ami Zucker, professor of American history at Bar Ilan University

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MAY
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Grounded in a contemporary theology that situates the responsibility for creating a better world in human hands, with God acting through us, Choosing Hope can help us both affirm hope in times of trial and transmit our deepest hopes to the next generation.

David Arnow is a scholar of the festival of Passover. He is the author of Creating Lively Passover Seders and coeditor of My People’s Passover Haggadah.

MARCH
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is a blessing, a masterful illumination of the purpose and power of hope, an erudite feast of Jewish wisdom, and a wellspring of surprising, subversive, deeply satisfying epiphanies about the relationship between hope and all the emotions and experiences that comprise a life of meaning.”—Letty Cottin Pogrebin, author of Deborah, Golda, and Me

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Rabbi Eli L. Garfinkel is the spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in Somerset, New Jersey. He is the author of three books used by the Ramah camps: Mikraot Ramah, a summer camp commentary on the Torah for teen campers and adult staffs; Dim’ot Ramah, a companion volume on Lamentations; and Torat Ramah, a commentary for younger campers.

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Aileen Weintraub has been running away from commitment her entire life, hopping from one job and one relationship to the next. When her father suddenly dies, she flees her Jewish Brooklyn community for the wilds of the country, where she unexpectedly falls in love with a man who knows a lot about produce, tractors, and how to take a person down in one jiu-jitsu move. Within months of saying “I do” she’s pregnant, life is on track, and then wham! Her doctor slaps a high-risk label on her uterus and sends her to bed for five months.

As her husband’s bucolic (and possibly haunted) farmhouse begins to collapse and her marriage starts to do the same, Weintraub finally confronts her grief for her father while fighting for the survival of her unborn baby. In her precarious situation, will she stay or will she once again run away from it all?

Knocked Down is an emotionally charged, laugh-out-loud roller-coaster ride of survival and growth. It is a story about marriage, motherhood, and the risks we take.

Aileen Weintraub is an award-winning author, journalist, and editor. She has written for the Washington Post, Glamour, NBC, and AARP, among others. She has also published several children’s books, including Never Too Young! 50 Unstoppable Kids Who Made a Difference and We Got Game! 35 Female Athletes Who Changed the World.

“Knocked Down is a profoundly honest memoir that is sometimes painful but always loving, as she walks us through her journey from Brooklyn childhood to rural living. Heartfelt and often humorous Jewish culture meets rural farming culture, all coming together in the glorious Hudson Valley. It took us back to the best moment of our lives—the beginning of making a family.”—Mandy Patinkin and Kathryn Grody

“This memoir of an almost inconceivably difficult pregnancy (pun intended) involves multiple dichotomies: urban/rural, male/female, Jew/non-Jew, life/death. Weintraub handles these oppositions with the deft, stunning, and mesmerizing touch of a writer who knows when to weep and when to laugh, when to hold on and when to let go. Whatever the opposite is of ‘elegy,’ this is it.”—Sue William Silverman, author of How to Survive Death and Other Inconveniences

“A gripping blend of humor and poignancy.”—Sari Botton, author of And You May Find Yourself

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